

Wednesday, February 16, 2011

Republicans repeat like robots the same talking points we have heard again and again tonight, that to get our debt under control, middle class families are going to have to suck it up. We face tough choices, harsh choices; but really there is no choice. We are going to have to cut public education drastically, along with Head Start for the children who otherwise would start kindergarten too far behind to ever catch up; job training for workers who have lost their jobs; Pell Grants so middle class kids can afford a college education; research at the National Science Foundation and Department of Energy, and on and on.

Mr. Chairman, we do have choices. We have this deficit because of choices we have made. Just a decade ago, the debate here was what to do with the surplus. Alan Greenspan, who was then the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, worried that it might unsettle the economy if we paid off the national debt too quickly. President Clinton urged that we use the surplus to shore up Social Security and Medicare so that my generation could live in dignity when we retire.

A Republican President and a Republican Congress decided instead to cut taxes sharply for the richest of the rich. The deficit we face now is because of that choice, and we saw just 2 months ago that protecting those tax cuts for the richest of the rich, even Americans making more than \$1 million a year, was their first priority. So despite all of the weeping and wailing, the gnashing of teeth, the rending of garments about the deficit now, just 2 months ago they said not a word about the deficit when they were voting to cut taxes, to explode the deficit by cutting taxes on the very richest Americans.

So now Congress is voting to kick 200,000 kids out of Head Start so that Americans who worked and strived to be conceived to the right parents will pay little in inheritance taxes.

Now Congress is voting to fire 17,000 teachers and special educators so Americans making more than \$1 million a year will not have to pay the income taxes that they paid in the nineties, which was hardly a confiscatory rate.

And much of the bill obviously has nothing to do with saving money or whether the government is too big or too small. It is about whose side the government is on. This bill cuts drastically the funding needed to protect middle class families from the gouging that has lurked in the legalese, the fine print of financial contracts, the tricks and the traps written by banks' lawyers. That cut has nothing to do with saving money. It is all about putting government on the side of financial predators, not on the side of hardworking honest Americans trying to make an honest living.

We have seen cluster of rare cancers and birth defects that we know are the result of an environmental exposure to something, and this bill devastates environmental protection. Middle class children are facing life with lower IQs because of unchecked environmental exposure so polluters can have bigger profits and CEOs can reward themselves with bigger bonuses.

Many of my colleagues have argued that this bill is penny wise and pound foolish, it is shortsighted and will hurt the economy. All of that is true. But I am most disturbed that this bill represents values that are incompatible with values that I learned at my mother's knee, the values of generations of Americans, the values of the faith traditions of most Americans, including me, the values that have been the glue that has held our country together in tough times. I will vote "no."